

religious parties, has led to incredible corruption.

"Political position in Iraq has become a way to steal money and then leave the country," says one official in the defense ministry, where tens of millions of dollars vanished. With few exceptions, the new crop of ministers, also picked by party, does not appear much better than the old.

This system has made many Iraqis sour on democracy quickly. They are hungry for strong leadership. Over and over, I've heard Iraqis say Hussein could have restored order in two weeks.

This is why it is so crucial for Maliki to be able to act as a national leader who stands above the interests of sectarian parties. But it isn't easy for Maliki to make that leap. For one thing, he has virtually no experienced staff; much of what he does have is limited to his Shiite religious party, the Dawa.

I asked one of the bright lights in the new government, Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih, what was to be done. Salih, a Kurd whom I met over a kebab feast in his garden with his peshmerga (Kurdish militia) guards, manages to combine ethnic loyalty with a commitment to building an Iraq for all its people.

"Prime Minister Maliki says he wants to transcend his Shia affiliation and act as a national leader," Salih said. "It is incumbent on all of us in Iraq and Iraq's friends in the international community to help us realize that objective."

It is unclear how or if that can be done. But the prospects for Iraq and for U.S. troop withdrawals depend on whether Maliki can lead.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MACK). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. JONES) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. JONES of North Carolina addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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ALTERNATIVE FUELS RESEARCH

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GOODE. Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight to tell the House and the United States that leading edge research into the development of alternative fuels is happening as we speak in the Fifth District of Virginia at the Institute for Advanced Learning and Research in Danville, Virginia. The institute is a mission of Virginia's land grant institution, Virginia Tech. The institute anchors the technology economy of southside Virginia, and one of its research initiatives focus on sustainable and renewable resources.

In particular, the scientists working in this field are directing their efforts toward generating alternative energy from renewable resources such as switchgrass and hybrid poplars. The scientists believe that these renewable resources can be used in biofuels, biodiesels and bioenergy. The research being conducted at the institute is not

just laboratory work, it is applied research. In that light, the institute has formed a partnership with Wendy Acres Nursery in Gretna, Virginia, also in the Fifth District. At Wendy Acres, they are growing species of switchgrass and hybrid poplar which have a low ash content when processed. This characteristic makes these plants better suited for bioenergy and biofuels. These species are being bred and investigated for use in short-rotation woody plant species and herbaceous perennials as feedstocks by the Institute for Sustainable and Renewable Resources to determine the most efficient production of bioenergy and biofuels.

Mr. Speaker, I have here a container of wood chips. I also have a container of switchgrass. What the scientists have come up with is this biofuel. This is just steps away from being able to be utilized in vehicles all across this Nation. I look forward to the day when we have no dependence on Venezuela and Mr. Chavez for our oil needs. I look forward to the day when we have no dependence on the Middle East and sheiks there for our oil needs. I look forward to the day when we are free of foreign fossil fuel. And I hope all across America we can do as they are doing in Danville and other places, making our own fuel and giving us energy independence.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DEFAZIO) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. DEFAZIO addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

AMERICA'S AGRICULTURE

Mr. ROSS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to speak out of order for 5 minutes.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentleman from Arkansas is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. ROSS. Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor tonight deeply concerned about the future of our Nation's farm economy and the well-being of our farmers and ranchers. America's farm families provide the most safe, reliable and abundant source of food and fiber in the world. The security of our Nation's domestic food supply is critically important to the security of our homeland. We must continue to provide our farm families with the tools and resources necessary to continue producing our food and fiber to ensure we never become as dependent on foreign countries for our food as we are for our oil today.

I was extremely disappointed in this Republican Congress and their decision to cut agriculture disaster funding during conference committee negotiations of the emergency supplemental appropriations bill last week. I was also struck by the fact that the administra-

tion even weighed in by threatening its first veto ever of this supplemental if it contained disaster assistance for our farm families. Making these cuts on the backs of our farmers and ranchers when they are struggling to make ends meet is unconscionable.

Mr. Speaker, it is about priorities, and the decision made by this Republican Congress and administration does not reflect the commonsense priorities and values that many Arkansans and I were raised on and still believe in.

Agriculture is Arkansas' largest industry and ranks among the top 10 States in the production of rice, poultry, cotton, catfish and baitfish. In fact, one in every five Arkansas jobs is directly related to agriculture. According to a forecast by USDA's Economic Research Service, farm income is estimated to decline by \$16.5 billion in 2006 as a result of increased production costs and reductions in market assistance. Reduction in farm income, combined with the hardships experienced during the 2005 crop year, will lead our Nation's farm economy into the worst decline of the 21st century.

As you can see from the poster here, Mr. Speaker, the red line, the top line, indicates the amount of money that it costs our farmers to grow crops. The bottom line demonstrates the amount of money they have received. They are losing money. In 1985, farmers spent anywhere from \$80,000 to \$85,000 on a new tractor. Today, a farmer will spend anywhere from \$140,000 to \$150,000 on a new tractor.

As the chart shows, our farm families have seen a steady increase in the cost to produce their crops, while at the same time the prices they receive for their crops remain the same and are lower than they were 10 years ago. In fact, in 1980, cotton was going for 60 cents a pound. Today, it is 42 cents a pound. Rice was going for \$11.50 per hundred weight. Today, it is \$7 per hundred weight. Soybeans, in 1980, \$5.71 a bushel. Today, just a slight increase, at \$6.09 a bushel.

In 2005, our Nation's farm families faced severe droughts, hurricane damaging winds and other natural events causing damage and devastation to their crops and livestock. Americans have been hit hard by the drastic increase in gasoline, diesel and natural gas prices. Our Nation's farm sector relies heavily on diesel fueled farm equipment to plant, harvest and transport their products to market. Increased fuel, fertilizer and other record high input costs have pushed many farmers out of business altogether, forcing them to auction off their family farms.

I have been urging this Republican Congress and administration to pass disaster assistance for our farm families since September of last year. I stand here tonight holding this binder, a binder recently presented to me by Ken Shea of Dumas, Arkansas. It is filled with farm auction after farm auction, fliers, notices of bankrupt

farm families from Arkansas. Even if a disaster bill was passed today, it would be too late for these farm families and many others who are trying desperately to avoid bankruptcy. Every day that passes without providing disaster assistance, more families are auctioning off their farms.

I am a cosponsor of H.R. 3702, an agriculture disaster assistance bill which was introduced in September of last year.

Mr. Speaker, I stand here tonight urging the Republican leadership to give us a hearing and a vote on this bill.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BURGESS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BURGESS addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

CONGRESSIONAL CONSTITUTION CAUCUS' CONSTITUTION HOUR—CONSENT DECREES

Mr. GARRETT of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I rise to claim my time out of order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentleman is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. GARRETT of New Jersey. I do thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tonight, I come here as we do each week as members of the Constitutional Caucus come here on a regular basis to present a series of 5-minutes following the day's activities and the day's votes. We do so tonight to focus on really one of the most important and significant issues dealing with our Constitution and threats to our constitutional rights as well.

Before I do that, let me just say this, that I wish to show my utmost appreciation earlier this evening for the majority whip coming out and joining us to discuss a piece of his legislation that goes to this very fundamental issue and also for his efforts to work to protect those basic liberties of every American.

The threats that I am referring to is our Founding Fathers' principles of self-government and the jeopardy that comes in the form of consent decrees. For those of you who are not familiar with exactly what consent decrees are, in essence, they are simply this. They are judicial actions that are entered into between opposing parties, in this case by the party bringing the action, private individuals, usually, and State or local entities. State or local governments are basically compelled at the end of a court case to enter into these agreements. They are then, therefore, called consent decrees. In their name and on their face, they sound innocent enough. In reality, they simply can be because they are protecting rights of some sort or the other. But they can

also have in the long-term a cumulative effect, a threat to the legislative process and also to the hardworking American taxpayer who supports it as well.

These decrees have resulted in judges engaging themselves in affairs outside of their constitutional job description, outside of the very framework of the protections that we have established in our documents of checks and balances. I say that their intents are noble and good in many cases, and that is to protect our rights, but by engaging in such blatant activism, they are actually threatening self-government itself, rights outside what our Founding Fathers intended.

I agree with what the majority whip had indicated before. This is not simply a case of dealing with judicial activism because it really goes beyond that and does not engage in that at all times. It is an understanding that our Founding Fathers had, and we have reminded those who have listened to these programs, listened to us coming to the floor each week to discuss constitutional issues, that we must be very mindful always of protecting those rights set forth by the Fathers, especially the rights of States as established in the 10th amendment. All rights not specifically delegated to the Federal Government are retained by the people and the States, respectively.

Consent decrees, therefore, can place an undue burden on the States and local officials. They can last literally for decades, long after the local officials or State officials who may have been involved with those cases in the first instance have long since left office. Newly elected officials may have come into place to find they are bound by those previously entered into decrees. They are now unable to place in policies that could rectify the situation, unable to put in policies that could solve the situation for future generations, and unable to put in policies that basically could save the taxpayers money at the end.

Judges have already tried to engage in other ways in activism, obviously of taking away our rights as we have discussed before, taking away our property rights and the democratic right to construct our marriage institutions.

But consent decrees go one step further. They chip away at the authority of our local officials, allowing judges and not the people who were democratically elected to represent them. This is not just a decision and opinions of Members of Congress. The Supreme Court has also spoken on this. In fact, in a unanimous decision back in 2004, the U.S. Supreme Court called for limiting these types of decrees in the case of *Frew v. Hawkins*. The court proclaimed there that Federal consent decrees could encroach on State and local power. They continued that these decrees may "improperly deprive future officials of their designated and executive powers." They may also lead "to Federal court oversight of State pro-

grams for long periods of time even absent an ongoing violation of the law."

Mr. Speaker, for these reasons, I am more than proud to support my good friend from Missouri and his legislation, H.R. 1229, the Federal Consent Decree Fairness Act. This is legislation that would provide relief to newly elected mayors and other State officials who inherit these overly broad and outdated decrees. It would limit their ability to govern. And it would be able to respond to priorities of their constituents for the future.

This legislation will put term limits on existing decrees while setting out guidelines for the future. We must ensure that they are limited in nature, not opening the doors for future violations. Again, I commend the gentleman from Missouri.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EMANUEL) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. EMANUEL addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

RED INK CONTINUES TO PILE UP

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to reclaim my time and to address the House for 5 minutes.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentlewoman from Ohio is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, the red ink continues to pile up, both in our budget deficit and in America's trade deficit. The Commerce Department reported on Friday that the trade deficit is rising again, pushed up by oil prices and a flood of more imports from China. With oil imports over \$70 a barrel, we know this trade deficit is going to swell as the year proceeds. The Commerce Department reported that the gap between what the United States sells abroad and what it imports rose to \$63.4 billion in April, 2.5 percent higher than the March imbalance of \$61.9 billion. We know that the trade deficit in both February and March just fell a tad, but it had hit an all-time high this January of \$66.2 billion. And while economists noted that the April deficit was smaller than the \$65 billion that had been expected, it is still the sixth largest trade deficit on record.

□ 2230

This is a chart that takes a look at what has been happening ever since this Congress unfortunately passed NAFTA back in the early 1990s, followed by permanent normal trade relations with China, and what could be normal about that? Every single year the red ink gets deeper.

Through the first 4 months of this year, the trade deficit is running 1.9 percent above the same period a year ago putting our country on track to